

The Last Will and Testament of Levanah Goldstein

Word count – 1,000

Last Will and Testament

Levanah Goldstein

To my always curious grandchild, Jared:

If you are reading this, clearly I am dead. Please do not miss me; this is the death I wished for so long ago in the camps, peaceful, and with love. I did not want to die with hate in the gas chambers of a foreign land, my bones scattered, walked over, forgotten. My ashes spread by the winds of loss, blown into the lungs of the innocents being worked to death. As a child, you asked me what was on my arm and why, those blue numbers fascinated you beyond imaginations, then when you learned to see what it truly was, you eyed it as if it would come alive and bring with it the misery it brought me. With all that, I didn't tell you my story. In those earlier years, I just wanted to forget, to live a normal life. You had the childhood I'd always dreamed of, how could I take that from you? Everyday I awoke with that pain burning a hole in my heart, and slowly I learned to temper it, to control it. It lessened, moved to the back of my mind, but it was always there, looming in the shadows. Threatening to break me down, but I win the battle in my mind, even if it never entirely goes away. You are old enough now, to know my story, to understand what happened to me. I should have done this while I was alive... but I ran out of time. I will not tell you my story in its entirety. No, you will never be ready for that, it is too dark for words, for emotions, but I will tell you some of it. I will tell you about my bowl.

"...I arrived at Djelfa in 1939, it was a French camp.

Winter was ending, and spring was coming. We entered our newly assigned barracks, shivering from the merciless, frost ridden winds. A German soldier came and brought us to dinner, his name was Silbernagel, and he was a cruel man. It was said that if you misbehaved, he would forcefully take you to bed with him. We all hated him,

although I was never a victim to his perverse punishment. When we arrived in the cafeteria, a special line formed for the newcomers. Head shorn, freezing, starving, I must have looked horrible. The server looked at me kindly. She was a woman roughly middle aged, I don't know her name; all I know is that she gave me two things; a bowl, and a warning.

"This is your bowl now," she told me, not unkindly. "You must learn it, memorize it, the exact concave, the dips and scars, the smudges and dents. This bowl is your lifeline here. Without it, you get no food. Without this bowl, you become them." She jerked her chin over to a far corner in the back of the room. In the corner huddled a small group of girls, shivering, emaciated beyond human recognition. I will never forget how feral, how broken they looked. In their eyes sat no hope, only want and acceptance. That night I wept for them before I fell asleep, and in the morning, three were gone.

I stayed in Djelfa for the remainder of the war, and of the group of 300 girls I had come with, only sixty of them were still alive. For all those years, I held onto that bowl, because it held life, my life. When we were liberated, a soldier took my bowl, and began to walk away. I screamed until he came back and asked me what was wrong.

"My bowl..." I whispered, my voice raspy with disuse and illness.

"This?" He asked me, confusedly as he held up my bowl for me to see. All I could manage was a weak nod, and I reached feebly for the one thing that had kept me alive for so long, a simple, dirty, metal bowl. My bowl.

By now, you may have recognized the bowl I speak of, didn't you ask me about it often enough? The small, dingy bowl in my good china cupboard, tarnished and dented. The first place you went in my house every time you would visit as a small child was that cupboard, you would carefully inspect each piece of the set, and finally you would come to The Bowl.

"Nana, why do you keep that dirty bowl here?"

I am truly sorry, you deserved to be told all this while I was alive, it just never happened. As this is my will, and what are wills for after all, but to leave our beloved objects with family and friends? And so it comes down to this, Jared, my curious grandchild, I leave to you my bowl.

I leave you my bowl, in the hopes that you will remember me fondly, and lead a better life than I did. Keep that bowl, share it's story with your children, and your grandchildren, and let them know that the world wasn't

always peaceful, that love isn't always there. Show them that anyone can make a difference, and it's up to them whether or not they make a good difference, or the kind of difference that ends millions of innocent lives. When your time comes, it is my fondest wish that you pass along the bowl to your own curious grandchild, and they will teach their children that there can always be hope, even in the darkest situation. For that is what my bowl really stands for, hope.

I, Levanah Goldstein, being of sound mind and body, do agree to what has been written in this, my Last Will and Testament.

Levanah Goldstein, *Levanah Goldstein*

I, Reuven Berg, being of sound mind and body, do legally witness the last Will and Testament of, Levanah Goldstein.

Reuven Berg, *Reuven Berg*